Health Minister Gagan Thapa hit the ground running when he took office seven months ago. Even though he hasn’t been able to launch a national health insurance plan, sick infants will now get free treatment, and the government will pay for patients needing dialysis and kidney transplants.

Thapa’s new year gift to Nepal isn’t gone unnoticed, and some of his fans have even proposed that he declare his candidacy for mayor of Kathmandu in the 14 May elections. But, in an interview (page 6), Thapa says he still has a lot more to do. “People are worried how the government can afford all this free treatment, but no government can run from this basic responsibility to provide this kind of health service to the people. It’s not a luxury, it’s mandated.”

That may be easier said than done, and Thapa seems to be walking too fast for his ministry to keep pace. Health Secretary Seswanda Rai Upsetu says there has been no official decision on the announcement about free kidney transplants. Koila Ram Shrestha of the Health Ministry says they are looking at options: “Now that the minister has announced it, we have to find the money. But there will be a budget for this in the next fiscal year.”

Waiting for his dialysis at Bir Hospital this week, Gopal Shrestha praised Thapa: “We need more ministers like him.” Kidney patients get Rs 400,000 for transplants but the actual cost is Rs 450,000, even if they find a family donor. The government will now cover the shortfall. Previously, kidney patients received free dialysis twice a week for two years. Last year, Prime Minister K.P. Oli (who has had a double kidney transplant) announced free, lifelong dialysis to patients. Thapa went a step further and announced three free dialysis sessions a week.

But hospitals are finding it hard to cope. A doctor at Bir Hospital told Nepal Times: “There is a long waiting list of patients, and we are finding it difficult to offer dialysis even twice a week.”

There are only 200 dialysis machines at 36 hospitals in Nepal, so only about 1,200 patients get the treatment. Besides transplants and dialysis, patients also need support for expensive medicines (see page 8).

“Free transplant will reduce the number of patients needing dialysis,” says Pratikosh Deswal of National Kidney Centre. “But we still need more dialysis machines.”

Om Astha Rai
SECOND CHANCE

It’s hard to believe that it has already been two years since an earthquake devastated Central Nepal, leaving nearly 9,000 people dead, more than 2 million homeless and a country in a state of shock. Although the loss of life and destruction was tragic, Nepal got off lightly. Only 14 of the country’s 75 districts were affected, the frequency and duration of the shock waves meant that concrete structures were spared, and 25 April 2015 being Saturday saved thousands of school children.

These were important lessons we could have learned about preparedness for the inevitable Even Bigger One. Post-earthquake reconstruction provided the perfect opportunity to reverse the out-migration of young men. Political parties had the chance to prove that they had the welfare of Nepal foremost in their minds. The aftermath of the earthquake should have shaken us enough for parliament to finally set up the Disaster Management Authority to deal with future calamities. We squandered it all.

And rescue and relief efforts could have been better managed if there were elected local councils accountable to the people. Finally, there is a glimmer of hope that we may have elections on 14 May for village, district and municipal bodies. But as the second anniversary approaches, there isn’t much more to add to a similar editorial we wrote last year in this space on the first anniversary.

The only difference is that the lack of urgency on the part of the state is even more glaring. Mixed in politics and competition to take credit for relief, political parties have cancelled themselves out—leaving the people largely fund for themselves. The National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) has been bogged down by the conflict and UML taking tans to oust and indoct their own chiefs.

The NRA headed by Govinda Pokharel got off to a fine start in 2015, and won the confidence of donors. But after it came to power, the UML replaced him with its own funkies. Pokharel was recently reinstated, but is being made to jump through hoops by political appointees within the NRA.

The agency has become a convenient lightning rod for blame, to let a belligerent government machinery off the hook. The NRA has only a coordinating role, and needs a nod from the Ministry of Finance for every pause; all reconstruction work is carried out through other ministries where there is little coordination.

In a candid interview last week, Pokharel told us that this was not the NRA he had envisaged in the 2015 Post Disaster Needs Assessment report. We endorse his call for the NRA to be able to manage its own funds.

And speaking of funds, Nepal has actually received less than a third of the $9.3 billion the NRA estimated it needed to rebuild homes, public buildings and infrastructure. Of the $4.3 billion pledged by donors in 2015, only $2.73 billion has actually materialised (most of it in loans).

This is not enough for the housing grant of Rs 300,000 per family, which itself is inadequate to rebuild. The NRA has come up with a new affordable design, but there seems little interest.

The main takeaway on the second anniversary is: International help has fallen far short of pledges and is much less than the amount actually needed, a lot of it is not going through the NRA. And (in other spheres of development) the government has failed in coordination.

EILEAD IS TO LIVE ON

While the debate on whether modern medical and techniques can be used in the restoration of built heritage continues, an artisan bather and can from Butwal city unify the ancestral occupation of woodwork. Log on to NepaliTimes online to watch two generations in action renovating a temple in Mahendrihula.

GUEST EDITORIAL

R K AGRAWAL

Saving our kidneys

The number of young Nepalis suffering from kidney problems and seeking treatment is increasing dramatically. This should be a matter of serious concern for the families and the nation; because failing to take care of our kidneys will add to the burden on our healthcare system.

The causes of kidney diseases in younger patients are different than those in the elderly population. The primary reason for kidney failures among the younger is Glomerulonephritis— an immunological disease aggravated by infections caused by problems related to lifestyle and the environment, like poor sanitation, drinking water, pollution and consumption of junk food.

About 80 per cent of glomerulonephritis cases are primarily, meaning that they are caused by altered immunological factors. In the remaining cases, the causes are secondary, led by infections. Increased use of painkillers and other drugs are also causing glomerulonephritis.

We can save young kidneys by raising awareness about glomerulonephritis so younger people can take preventive action. A simple urine examination is all it takes to detect the disease, and if treated early, more than 90 per cent of cases can be cured. But late detection and lack of treatment may force the patient’s kidney to fail, forcing dialysis treatment or even transplantation.

The government has made dialysis free, and has also announced that kidney transplants will be free from his month. Scaling up these services is important, but what is even more important is to prevent kidney from failing in the first place.

UPDATE

Mary Nepal Times readers were moved by the story of two-year-old Buddha Maya Shrestha (480) who contributed to the welfare of the severely malnourished child. As of April, Rs 8,225 had been collected. The Shrestha Foundation has moved Buddha Maya and her mother to a care facility in Kathmandu, Buddha Maya has been diagnosed with Arterio Sclerotic Leukemi (ASL), and needs medical care.

Some of the donation money was used to buy the family’s mobile phone before Buddha Maya’s father and four sisters returned to Nepal. Rs 14,000 will be used to pay the family’s utility bills and food. Further contribution can send suggestions of how the rest of the money can get the Shrestha family back on its feet.

We invite our readers to NepalTimes.com by 15 April 2017. Go online to watch heartfelt making of video of the Shrestha family struggling to keep their daughter alive.

GAGAN STYLE

At Health Minister, Gagan Thapa has tried to be a dis-incerter at a time in the seven months since he took office he has cracked down on politicians going abroad for treatment and instructed them to seek hospital accommodation, and expanded free treatment of serious illnesses. Go online and watch Minister Thapa share his future plans.

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

While the debate on whether modern medical and techniques can be used in the restoration of built heritage continues, an artisan bather and can from Butwal city unify the ancestral occupation of woodwork. Log on to NepaliTimes online to watch two generations in action renovating a temple in Mahendrihula.

WHAT’S TRENDS

Broken promises to be tested

Most media coverage on the first anniversary of the earthquake were in slow reconstruction, so at least 200 displaced by disasters have been up at the High Court for over twice-weekly dialysis, a move toward seeking ways to help their school, just two of many Nepali migrant workers who have suffered kidney failures.

Most visited online page

From New York to New York

“I have so far outgrown the light and shadow,” Firing of a Nepali Times editor by Kathmandu Post editor in chief has been given an exorbitant one-off payment.

“$10,000 and I am safe in Nepal.”

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepal Times hasır

A MUCK-DUGGER TOMORROW Crime and human rights is not growing and will not vanish on its own.

Sunit Thapa

I have been talking about this with my friends and they’re not interested in the story.

Artha Basnet

There is no hunger crisis in Nepal, the government is doing fine already and the country is doing well in every economic parameter.

Nepali Times

#NepalQuake survivors will need for reconstruction, urgent to return to their lives.

Avijit Roy

Life is like a weather

Hema Rana

Two years after the earthquake, this is a news of hope. Thousands of people are still in temporary housing “relying on aid”.

Times

42.0% to 15.0%

Toll Voting: 202

4.8k

The National Reconstruction Authority back on track?

4.8k

12.0% to 10.0%

Nepal Times

Can Nepal become the free healthcare system that Superbans is promoting?
DISCOVER ATHENS
FLY FROM KATHMANDU WITH TURKISH AIRLINES
ON THE WAY UP
Kanak Mani Dixit

THE PLACE OF NEPAL

We must accept the fact that the emplacement of Nepali as the state language and lingua franca of the country has resulted in weakening of the numerous tongues of this diverse land. But one question to ponder is what language would have taken over if not Nepali, under the nation-state that emerged two-and-a-half centuries ago.

It may have been Newa Bhasa (Nepal Bhasa), radiating out of Kathmandu Valley with its Ranjana lipi script, had the Malla kings decided to go on a campaign of conquest. Or it could have been Maithili, used with regularity in the royal courts of ‘Nepal Valley’. Had it been up to some political leaders after the fall of the Rana regime, Hindi would have been foisted from the top.

But it was Gorkhali/Nepali that made headway, and not only because it was the tongue of the conquering Khans. The well-known linguist George van Driem, expert on languages of the Himalayas, proposes that Nepali has spread far and wide not so much because it was an imperial tongue but because it is a language with dynamism.

He says: “Nepali is a sophisticated and successful language. The reasons for its success are diverse and complex and the linguistic topography needs study by social scientists.” By ‘linguistic topography,’ van Driem says he means “the entire constellation of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors which determine the robustness of a language.”

Kyare and Byare
Nepali spread over hill and plain for numerous reasons, most importantly the patronage of the Kathmandu state and the push given it in the modern era by King Mahendra in the 1960s. In large part this was done as a tool of administrative control, but many in the intelligentsia of the time were also committed to developing a language for diverse communities to communicate and find common cause.

There are many other engines that helped spread Nepali across the rugged countryside. Nepal was the link language of the Brigade of Gurkhas during the British Raj, and demobilised Gurkha (read janajati) soldiers returning to home villages from the battlefields of WWI, WWII, the War against Pakistan, etc., helped spread Nepali into the hill villages. Many carried with them Bhishnubhakti’s Ramayan, printed in Benaras.

In the modern era, modern Nepali ‘folk music’ incorporated (some would say captured) local tunes and music genres, which lent dynamic flair and acceptability to the language as spread by Radio Nepal (and later the hundreds of FM radio stations).

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NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.
Racing through the Himal

A s you read this, more than three dozen athletes have begun a more than 200-kilometer run through the Nepalese Himalaya, from East to West. Starting near Kanchenjunga Base Camp in Taplejung (5,140m), on 6 April, they will follow the Great Himalayan Trail, winding through Langtang, Gunes Himal, Manaslu, Mustang, Dolpa and Humla Valley, before ending at Helambu at Nepal’s border with Tibet. At their highest point, the racers will reach an altitude of 5,800m.

One of the longest foot races on earth, through the world’s greatest mountain range, people also refer to the Great Himal Race as “the race you can see from the moon.” This year, participants will traverse the entire Nepalese Himalaya for the first time. In 2016, the race also started in Taplejung, but ended in Kathmandu. The Great Himal Race was organised by Bruno Poitier, who himself ran across Nepal in 1994, along with the French running collective. Apart from many French and other international runners, eight Nepalis will also participate. Runners have chosen to run solo or in a team of two or three. They will receive assistance every five-seven days.
When your father’s resume includes building Kathmandu’s famous temples, you have your work cut out if you intend to follow in his footsteps.

Despite that, Ratna Sundar Silpakar made the brave decision to emulate his famous dad, Mangal Bahadur Silpakar, but changing times have complicated that choice.

Both father and son uphold the tradition of wood carving, but are pragmatic when it comes to adapting to modern construction techniques, especially after the earthquake destroyed many of Kathmandu Valley’s monuments.

Mangal Silpakar has in the past worked on the Askashi Bhairab shrine, the Mahaboudha temple, Dyo Chhep at Teshahal, the Nakal Bhagawati, Bhumarshi Mahadev Mandir and the reconstruction of Hanuman Dhoka museum.

Today, both father and son acknowledge the challenge of finding the right raw materials in post-earthquake rebuilding. Reconstruction is not an exact science, and they try to get the original design of fallen monuments from the municipality, but these are usually not accurate.

“In the case of temples that got damaged during the earthquake and don’t have any measurements, we look at the available photographs and estimate the dimensions,” explains Mangal, who has in the past used steel beams for the wooden dahan while working on the Dyo Chhep at Mahaboudha because a 13-foot timber span was unavailable.

Even the traditional buta mortar has been modified for strength. The original 1:1 ratio of surkhi and chun has been replaced with one part cement since the limestone is not of the required quality. The father notes that the time taken to make a temple is directly proportional to the availability of raw materials.

Ratna Silpakar graduated from Bhaktapur Multiple College but dabbled in wood carving only as a hobby as he tried a few salaried jobs. He eventually came back to what he felt was his true calling: learning the art of wood carving under the patient and diligent tutelage of his father, whose own knowledge was passed down from generation to generation.

In his early days, Ratna began with simple designs and small souvenir items for tourists. Eventually, like his father, he was confident enough to attempt reconstructing temples. We ask Mangal what difference he sees in the profession of wood carving today: “There is much more use of machines now to cut wood, but the final product is inferior to hand-carved items.” He takes his father’s advice and uses chisels and tools that haven’t changed in nine centuries.

But the real challenge is to find the right type and quality of wood.

Ratna is an exception; in Kathmandu most from his generation have not followed their ancestral professions, preferring to migrate for work or study abroad. He says he has found his life’s passion, and believes there is enough work to make a decent living.

What hasn’t changed are the qualities needed by a successful carver. Says Mangal Silpakar: "Carving is a skill that requires lifelong devotion and practice. You learn from your mistakes, and you get better with every item you carve."
Tap and tour

Bhuntu is a smart phone app that explains Nepal’s culture from the perspective of locals

CLARA BULLOCK

In a small office space across from City Centre mall, programmers, researchers and interns are busy developing a new smartphone app. Bhuntu will be a tool for tourists who want to discover Nepal’s culture. Sunam Shrestha started the project when she realised that a lot of tourists she met had a wrong picture of Nepal’s culture. “They’d say things about the Kumart, or traditions that were just wrong,” Shrestha says. “We wanted to change that.”

Shrestha wants to show tourists how she sees her country: she views Nepali culture as made up of many layers, but most people usually only see a few of them. Bhuntu is supposed to reveal the layers they’ve missed.

Nesting the app Bhunta, small child, is not a coincidence. The app is supposed to awaken the childish enthusiasm of discovering and learning about new things. “Children are curious about everything and they want to know more about the world they live in. We want grown-ups to rediscover that curiosity,” Shrestha says.

To achieve this, the app has three features. The events section explains important festivals and holidays going on in Nepal. The team will host their own events as well, for example food tastings. The group also researched information about all the important attractions in Kathmandu and hired locals to record tours. In section two, those tours can be purchased and listened to so tourists can explore buildings, places and streets.

The third feature is a platform for meeting people: everyone who has the app can add interests to their profile and meet like-minded tourists who might want to accompany them on their adventures.

However, the app is not only meant for visitors. Shrestha wants to make the information accessible to Nepalis as well. “Even people in Kathmandu don’t know everything about their heritage,” she says. “We offer the app itself and the events sections for free, so locals can learn more about the traditions too.”

Bhuntu is part of Shrestha’s bigger goal of preserving Nepal’s heritage. She believes protecting the culture starts with educating people about history and traditions. Plus, the group will donate a percentage of the income from sales of the app to the preservation of heritage sites. They believe everyone working in the tourism industry should do so that way there would be regular income for maintenance, and the cultural sites essential to Kathmandu’s tourism would retain their attraction.

Download and discover

Bhuntu is not the only app that helps people discover Kathmandu and Nepal. From finding domestic flights to booking a trek, there’s almost nothing you can’t do with your smartphone. Here is a selection of a few helpful apps.

Nepal Flights

If you want to go outside of Kathmandu but avoid buses, Nepal Flights offers domestic flights. You can book on various airlines flying to Pokhara, Bhaktapur, Bharatpur, Kathmandu and more.

Taxi Fares Nepal

One of the most annoying things for tourists in Kathmandu is when taxi drivers charge too much. The newly launched app shows the normal price for whatever route you are about to take. Additionally, it mentions waiting charges and right prices. This app might also be useful for locals.

Yellow Nepal

Whenever you’re in a new part of town and hungry, a nice dinner at a restaurant, this app will help. Yellow Nepal uses your GPS to find restaurants near you, and provides their details and menu. It will also let you know about events and deals near you.

Honey Guide

Honey Guide is a mapping app that helps guide you through the Himalayas. It offers trails toEvery base Camp, ABC and Parn Hill. Aside from showing you the way, it reviews lodges and details on places along the way.

PeakLens

While you’re out trekking with Honey Guide, you might want to know more about the mountains around you. With Peak Lens when you focus on a particular peak you will see its name and altitude. You can also add the names of mountains to photos in your gallery.

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.
A mysterious rash of kidney failures

There is an alarming increase in renal failures among Nepali migrants working in the scorching heat of the Gulf

OM ASTHA RAI

Bhakta Tamang and his brother-in-law Radha Rhandari have a few things in common: both worked in the Gulf, are 33 years old, and both lost their kidneys in their 20s.

Tamang was working in Bahrain when he started having high fever, headaches and swollen limbs. He was just 27 when doctors told him both his kidneys had failed. Rhandari had just got back home after working in Qatar when he found out at age 25 that his kidneys were no longer functioning.

Two years after Rhandari began having dialysis, Tamang joined him. They left their homes in Morang, and now share a rented flat in Kathmandu to visit Bir Hospital for dialysis on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Every time they walk out of the dialysis room, a man in his late 40s is waiting for his turn. He is Gopal Sarki from Ramchehap, and he too lost his kidney shortly after returning from Qatar eight years ago.

Nepal is now facing an alarming trend of kidney disease among its younger population, a significant number of them migrant workers, who are more vulnerable to renal failure because of tough physical labour in the desert, where they are often dehydrated.

"The conditions are difficult, they sweat a lot and do not drink enough water; that is why so

CAUSES OF KIDNEY FAILURE

- Diabetes
- Infections
- High blood pressure
- Inflammation (Nephritis)
- Kidney stones, prostate enlargement etc

TREATMENT

- 10% of people in Nepal have kidney-related problems, and 3,000 more patients have kidney failure every year.
- 36 hospitals in Nepal provide dialysis.
- Kidney transplants are offered at: Bir Hospital, Teaching Hospital, Human Organ Transplant Centre, National Hospital, National Hospital and the College of Medical Sciences Bhaktapur.

The treatment of kidney failure starts with dialysis which filters out waste and excess water from the body artificially. Dialysis is needed for the rest of a patient’s life, unless a kidney transplant is available.

- Most people have 2 kidneys, each the size of a fist.
- Kidneys have millions of nephrons that filter body fluids.
- The waste is disposed in the form of urine.
- Kidneys also regulate the blood pressure and control production of red blood cells.

Staying alive

By now, 20-year-old Dhan Baburam Bahar (pseudonym) should be graduating from college and getting a job. But the young man from Daung in the far western mountains could not complete his school education, and is now spending hours at the hospital just to stay alive.

When he was giving SSC exams five years ago, Bahar vomited blood and was rushed to hospital. He never returned to school, and both his kidneys failed. He was lucky to receive a new kidney from his mother, and lived a much better life for three years. But then his body rejected his mother’s kidney, and he has needed dialysis ever since.

"I spend three days a week at hospital, and this is the only work I do," says Bahar, who now lives in a rented room in Kathmandu with his 30-year-old wife and two-year-old daughter. His wife does not have a job either. He receives monthly for expenses from his father, who has migrated to work in India.

Bahar is one of the thousands of young Nepalis suffering from chronic kidney damage, and can survive only if he gets a new kidney, or keeps having dialysis at least twice a week.

It is estimated that 10 per cent of Nepal’s population is suffering from kidney diseases, and about 3,000 patients suffer kidney failure every year. There is no data on their ages, but doctors say more and more of the patients seeking treatment are young.

At Bir Hospital, the first hospital in the country to provide dialysis, 181 new kidney patients have been registered in the last three years. Seventy percent of them are below 40, and 45 are below 30. Twelve are even younger than 20; if this is any indication, it would be safe to say that half of Nepal’s kidney patients are below 40.

R K Agrawal, head of the Nephrology Department at Bir Hospital (now Queen Elisabeth), says diabetic and hypertensive are the main causes of kidney problems among the elderly, but among the young it is an immunological disease called glomerulonephritis, which can be aggravated by poor sanitation, contaminated water or even pollution.
many Nepalis are coming home with malfunctioning kidneys,” explains Shakti Bhatt of the Nepal Kidney Foundation. At Bir Hospital, senior nurse Indra Gaur has learned from frequent examinations of returnee migrant workers suffering from renal problems that the use of painkillers is also an important factor. “Migrant workers suffer cramps after long hours of hard work, and fear losing their wages if they cannot work. They tell me they take painkillers, which lead to infections and renal failure,” she says.

She was waiting for his dialysis on Tuesday morning and didn’t seem to know why his kidneys failed. He was a healthy man when he went to Bahrain, and had a pre-departure medical test to prove it. Within a year, both his kidneys had stopped working.

He was going to the company infirmary where he was given painkillers. “I don’t know if those medicines damaged my kidneys, but I feel I would still have my kidneys if I had stayed in Nepal,” he says.

Policies for the people

Health issues have been making headlines since Gagan Thapa became health minister seven months ago. He has promised to crack down on political leaders going abroad for treatment, expanded free coverage for serious illnesses and pledged to properly staff regional hospitals. But in the following excerpt, the minister told Nepal Times his preoccupation is long-term policy changes.

Nepal Times: Do you ever wonder if you’re being too ambitious, if you’re bitten off more than you can chew? Gagan Thapa: I don’t think so. What I feel is that the system here is not in sync with the speed at which we’re trying to move forward. Or I’m not fitting into the system. That’s my observation in the last six months.

Sometimes it sounds very ambitious and people may feel that since we haven’t been able to fix basic things—getting medicine, basic services in hospitals, a number of other services. And when you talk about providing these and that it might sound ambitious and I accept it, but we are not just making these statements without any solid evidence or framework.

To give you an example: when I talk about ensuring specialist services in peripheral health facilities, particularly rural hospitals, district hospitals, in the next three years, I’m making this statement on the basis that the ministry is going to start a post-graduation course at least five rural hospitals in the next three months, and we’re planning to go for the next 14 hospitals in the next year. The hospital is already there, the faculty is already there, demand is already there. The only thing we need to do is start the program.

We hear about the challenges, about the health posts that don’t have medicines, for example. It’s been seven months: what are some of the positive developments you can point to?

The biggest thing I think is the achievement is we’ve already introduced this integrated health services program. I’ve introduced it.

For the first time we’ve calculated that we will need 3,300 doctors. How are we going to produce these doctors? Well, we’re requiring 20,000 more nurses. How will we be getting these nurses? This is the first time those numbers have been brought to the table. And we have a number of policies to support this. Now the thing we need is resources: we have a resource deficit, and we are looking into this.

These plans sound impressive, but the average Nepali will know that something has changed when they go to the health post and the medicines are all available. When will that happen?

From Day 1, one of my priorities has been to fix the basics. Not announcing new programs, not starting up anything, but delivering what is already on the log. It’s a challenge to do. That’s why people feel that—people are noticing, because—what we’re trying to do is to improve the current system. For the very first time, instead of providing all the medicine from the centre, we gave almost half of this money to the district level, so now each district has the money to buy medicines, at least for the next three-four months.

It’s the same with doctors. We’re going to start post-graduate courses in a number of rural hospitals, but I will take at least four-five years to get these doctors who can send to the health facilities, but what about today’s need? We decided: let’s go and purchase with private hospitals, but yesterday we had a long meeting with the teaching hospitals.

Now at least I can say in the next two or three months you will find that at least basic services will be assured at district hospitals. This is not a long-term solution, of course, but this how we’re trying to work—a short-term solution and a long-term solution in nall of the major areas.

The international community has been involved in a lot of the work of the health ministry. How would you like to see that evolve?

As Health Minister I have to acknowledge the role played by the partners over a long period.

But now with the health ministry is trying to go for long-term programs, looking for longer solutions, I expect partners also to play a crucial role. Instead of these fragmented programs, stand-alone efforts and scattering of resources.

You have incredible drive and ambition and enthusiasm. How much of that is coloured by your thinking ‘I have to get things done before the political situation changes and maybe my position changes?’

When I got the health ministry I was so disappointed. I even wondered ‘If I should go or not’. So the health ministry was certainly new for me. This was the first time I was trying to do a long-term project for me... I’ve been very lucky that the three ministers, Finance Minister, Chief Secretary, my party president, from Day One, I’ve been getting all their support. Also, from all my other colleagues in either.

Would you like to be here one year from now? Yes, of course. Now what I feel is that I want to see some results from the steps that I have taken. I believe most of my time and energy in these policy reforms, and I want to see the result, and I want to see the continuity at least one year... But no one knows.
**Events**

**Heritage ride.**
Pedal through the seven world heritage sites of Kathmandu Valley with fellow cyclists and bike lovers. 15 April, 8 am to 6 pm, Borderline, Nepal. Kathmandu. (01) 4382174

**Kathmandu trail series.**
Gear up for a spectacular run that passes through the Shivapuri Hills. Escape the chaos of the city with fellow runners. 6 April, 7 am to 1 pm. Start point: Himalaya Childrens Foundation, Kapan. Registration: 0144220897

**Art market.**
A special edition in collaboration with the Kathmandu Triennale featuring interactive art events, live music, participation by local and international artists. 8 April, 12 to 6 pm. The Tribhuvana House, Swayambhunath. (01) 5006665 (Image 46)

**Photo workshop.**
Discover the inner photographer in you with this 15-day workshop conducted by veteran photographers. Starting date: 10 April, 6:30 to 9 pm. School of Creative Communications, Kapan. Register: https://goo.gl/vW4xm/ 9841752031/ 9851135231. Fee: Rs. 5000

**Chandrighori hike.**
Gear up for a hike to Chandrighori hill, starting from Manachaur, going through forests and smaller villages, and finally reaching the top to get an impressive view of the city. 14 April, Meeting point: Southend Guest House, Rs. 1000 per person. Registration: 01557257, 84837458, 8867228590, madhavkhop@gmail.com

**Meditation retreat.**
Spend seven days meditating at this retreat in Nagyargi Hills. The session is being conducted by Baddha Swami Aminand N. 8 to 14 April, Orito Topopan, Kathmandu. (01) 5112072/73. topopan@wolk.com.np

**Grunge live.**
Live the 90s grunge era this weekend by listening to bands Sound Chains Pilots, Neway and All Stars. 8 April, 7 pm onwards. Purple Haze Rock Bar, Thamel, Rs. 500. 9840276214

**New Year’s Eve.**
Enjoy live performances by legendary bands Cobweb and bands. Tushchewa Inn, Ember Eyes and Last Minute. 21/3 April, 6 pm onwards. The History, Sagnemgho Camp, 1916209966

**Starry night.**
Spend a musical evening listening to Chris Gurung while enjoying a meal at Shambala Garden. Every Friday, 7 pm onwards. Shambala Garden, Nekpur, Dhankuta, Rs. 3500 per person. (01) 4447299 (Extension 720, 7209)

**Cultural mela.**
An event celebrating 70 years of friendship between the US and Nepal featuring live graffiti by American artist Gazel Spreen, a performance by Nepali top artist Ruvika, skate board stunt, live music and more. 8 April, 11 am to 5 pm. Skiff College, jawalakhel.

**Little Picasso.**
Enroll your children in this ten-day art workshop to help them develop and nurture their artistic and observational skills. 8 to 17 April, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm including Saturday, Akhilesh Hospital Road, 9851739808. 9851737589. 9848012722. littlepicasso@gmail.com, Registration fee: Rs. 5500

**BLU live.**
Listen to the New Delhi based blues band BLU blend out some of their new and reworked Standard blues. 14 April, 8 to 7 pm. House of Music, Kathmandu. 9801558152

**Drum circle.**
Groove to the rhythm of a drum circle this full moon night, living along your drums at Jhul and enjoy the music. 27 April, 6 to 7:30 pm. House of Music, Thamel. (01) 44425341

**Kaiser Cafe.**
Enjoy a cuppa and an intimate meal in the Bird’s Nest Garden of Dreams. (01) 44425341

**The Last Resort.**
In south of Nepal, New Year's Eve at Shivapuri Hills. Make it more relaxing by dropping in for a massage at Meera's Spa. Budhanilkantha, Rs. 6500 per person on sharing basis (includes breakfast and dinner). 9845379227/9839227324, vjl@shivapuristorage.com

**Himalayan Height Resort.**
Tucked away near a jungle at the side of a hill with a 270 degree view of the Valley. Pharping, Kathmandu, 981877374, 981671641

**Jhule mountain resort.**
Relaxing 2000m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farm house that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic nature’s experience. Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, 1, supplied=3, jhule, (01) 5672099

**Buddha Maya Gardens.**
Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini, (01) 7562030, 9801233100, vyleafarthing.com

**Music**

**Tasneem’s Kings Kitchen.**
A charming restaurant serving the unique flavours of distinctive Indo-Pakistani Muslim Food. Thamel, 9801782227/23, (01) 2795032

**Meera.**
A great atmosphere, friendly staff, and reliably satisfying dishes with a view of the Old Palace. Dhuskotkut, (01) 4422087

**Privé.**
Wine and dine at this envy-specialising in Middle Eastern cuisine located in LAAB, one of the most happening malls in Kathmandu. Open from 6 pm onwards, LAAB, Pulchowk

**Barista Lavazza.**
The Valley’s best European inspired coffee-culture café serves excellent mocha and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jawalakhel, (01) 4442012, barista nepalg@gmail.com

**Buddha Maya Gardens.**
Add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini, (01) 7562030, 9801233100, vyleafarthing.com
EXPOSURE TO EXPRESSION

#NepalQuake
25 April 2015
2 years after

The village of Sipapokhari in Sindhupalchok was devastated by the earthquake two years ago. Many journalists visited it to take pictures, but a team of professional photographers trained young boys and girls of the village to use DSLR cameras and let them tell their own stories. For four days last month, the participatory photography workshop helped the youth to explore their everyday lives and give them expression through images of the world around them.

Photographers from Nepal, the Netherlands and the United States, led by Kevin Bubriski, gave the youngsters aged 10-15 from the Dalli, Tamang and Newar communities the chance to make photographic stories of themselves, their families and communities.

The collection of the students’ photographs premiered on 27 March at Jassscar/Nexus in Bhaktapur, as part of the Kathmandu Triennale. The 16 students will be hosted there again 6-8 April to meet, collaborate with national and international artists, and exhibit their photographs.

The work will also be disseminated to a large national and international audience through social media platforms. There are also plans to distribute a print publication to every school in Nepal, especially in the remote regions where wi-fi and roads have not yet reached. Ideally this project will encourage all young people in Nepal to openly explore their identity and diversity.
It's hard to really define *Jackie*, an impressionistic film about the hours and days after John F. Kennedy's (JFK) assassination and how Jacqueline Kennedy dealt with her unimaginable loss, without speaking about the woman chosen to play her and the effectiveness of her portrayal.

The film focuses on the performance of Natalie Portman in the lead role. She has never seemed a great actress to me, her beauty and her mannerisms just not versatile enough to play the variety of roles that a truly great actor like Streep can embody. Portman shares Jacqueline Kennedy's colouring, but that first lady was more beautiful, with a classical face of her times not the elfin features of the also lovely Portman. It is admittedly a bit distasteful to pick apart somebody's looks, but unfortunately when an actor is cast to type, as Portman has been in this case, there is no way out of evaluating both her physical resemblance to the historical figure and the appropriateness of that choice, which seems more motivated by resemblance than by skill.

Personally I think the casting was a poor choice. Rachel Weisz was the initial individual in mind, with her then partner Darren Aronofsky, a skilled, adventurous filmmaker, directing; both choices would probably have yielded better results.

With *Jackie*, Chilean director Pablo Larraín directs his first English language feature, and while the script itself is somewhat cold, there is also a feeling of something lost in translation. Portman's overly mannered copy of Jackie's speech, the signature breathy voice and her distinctive transatlantic accent, just don't sound right, even though other people seem to have been utterly taken in; the role earned Portman a Best Actress nomination which she lost to Emma Stone for *La La Land*.

In addition to this discommodating performance by Portman is the incredibly strange script that paints every player, including Bobby Kennedy (an always great Peter Sarsgaard), JFK's beloved younger brother, as unsympathetic, unfeeling and wooden. The characters say the right things, the Johnsons – Lyndon and Ladybird – who had to step up as President and First Lady, come off as cruel, ambitious people, but nothing coalesces to show what it must have been like on that horrendous, fateful day.

Today, JFK's White House is remembered with nostalgia, as a kind of Camelot, where the leaders were young, noble, egotistical, handsome and brave. With Bobby and Jack (as JFK was known) the two main knights in shining armour. That myth was created by Jackie in the weeks after her terrible loss, starting with a carefully controlled interview with Theodore H White for *Life* magazine. There she first planted the seed for the Camelot analogy by telling White that it was Jack's favourite musical.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was undoubtedly one of the most famous women of her time. She was clever, beautiful, complicated and brave; this Jackie does not quite do her justice.
Madhav Bhandari in Nepal, 2-8 April

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had planned to get his China visit endorsed by a cabinet meeting before leaving Kathmandu on 3 March. But Dahal was not sure which of his deputies to make acting Prime Minister: Bimalendra Nidhi of the NC and Kamal Thapa of the RFP were both claiming seniority. So Dahal called off the cabinet meeting, and left Nepal for the week-long visit without naming anyone acting Prime Minister.
This is just another example of how Dahal has lost his ability to make bold decisions. When he became Prime Minister for the first time in 2008, Dahal did not shy from making bold and even controversial decisions. He was then a symbol of fierceness and revolutionary zeal. Dahal is now a different person. It seems that he has lost his ability to lead and persuade, and is fast becoming a man of inaction.
During his first prime ministerial tenure, Dahal sacked Army Chief Rookmanda Katwal despite opposition from other parties, ended the practice of appointing an Indian as the head priest of Pashupatinath, proposed a revision of the 1950 treaty with India and agreed to integrate ex-Maoist combatants into the national army despite opposition from hardliners within his party.
This time, Dahal looks a shadow of himself. He has not yet decided whether Nidhi or Thapa is senior to Thapa. He failed to exercise his power to choose a police chief of his choice, and agreed on the name proposed by NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba. The only significant decision that Dahal has made so far is to announce local elections on 14 May, but this he did only after being pressed by Deuba.
Then, Dahal was defiant to India. This time, he has not uttered a word against the neighbour, even when a Nepali was killed by the Indian border force in Kathmandu district.
A leader from Dahal’s own party says: “Our Prime Minister has turned into a rubber stamp. He does what he is told by his coalition partners.”
The Maoist-Central spokesperson Pampha Bhusal puts it differently: “As the leader of the ruling coalition, the Prime Minister has to walk hand-in-hand with other parties. He cannot make every decision on his own. Bhusal adds that Dahal would have remained the same flexible leader if the Maoists had triumphed in the last election.
Princely help
Poshna Pahukhary in nepalobserver.com, 4 April
In April last year, pictures of Britain’s Prince Harry touring to rebuild an earthquake-damaged school in Ilam were spiked in the Nepali media. A year later, reconstruction work at the same school, Prabhakaran Secondary School, is complete.
Children, teachers and parents of the school cannot contain their happiness. Students, who had been staying in makeshift shelters, are excited to be moving into a sturdy building. Principal Bala Tamu explained that the earthquake-resistant school with 12 rooms was built after an investment of Rs 35 lakhs. It is now gearing up to conduct classes from its new building once the next session starts.
Prince Harry had spent six days in Lamjung, a village at the epicentre of the April 2015 earthquake, during his official visit to Nepal last year. On hearing that Prabhakaran Secondary School needed rebuilding help, Harry volunteered with Team Rubicon UK, it was then that pictures of the prince carrying wooden beams and stacks of cement surfaced in the Nepali media. Believ that the school’s new building has been completed has already been conveyed to Prince Harry, say Team Rubicon officials.
However, the school is not without problems. Although the building is done, it still lacks furniture and teaching materials. Since students have to travel long distances to reach the school it also needs a hostel, said the principal but, “there is no budget,” explained Tamu. Prabhakaran is among the minority of schools to have been rebuilt in Lamjung. In total, 443 schools in the district were destroyed by the earthquake. Only 100 have been rebuilt so far, according to the district education office.
RAISA PANDE
in CHITWAN

The 7.8 magnitude quake that rattled Nepal two years ago devastated the lives and livelihoods of its residents. While people around the country are finally moving towards recovery and reconstruction, for the residents of the village of Sorathok in Chitwan, temporary shelters have become permanent solutions.

Sorathok is in the shadows because Chitwan is not included administratively among the badly affected districts, even though it borders Gothka across the Trisuli River to the north.

Before the earthquake, Sorathok was a thriving Gurung village with 200 residents. But people have moved out and only 45 residents remain, trying to rebuild their homes.

They have moved from tarps to temporary tin shelters, but are exposed to hailstorms and rain. Every dark cloud raises fears about food supplies, the safety of livestock and their own wellbeing.

Luckily, no one was killed in Sorathok, but every house was damaged. Two years later, the village is a jumble of temporary shelters and remains of damaged structures. The earthquake changed more than just where the villagers were to live; it changed their way of life.

Most moved away from their land to rented rooms along the Kathmandu-Pokhara Highway, from where they have watched relief convoys head to Gothka. While other districts received considerable attention from national and international agencies, residents of Sorathok are refugees who haven’t even got the first part of the government’s housing grant.

LUCIA DE VRIES

A remarkable chain of events shook up the lives of three friends after the earthquake, landing them in a village southwest of Kathmandu. After settling in Dollu, they never looked back. “It may sound strange, but the earthquake brought us so much good,” they say.

On 29 April 2015, Danish expat Christian Simon Simmelkjaer (pic, left) was frying an omelette when he heard a rumbling. Seconds later he found himself outside the house, unsure what to hold on to. Chitravu Lehani and Swikriti Acharya (pic, right) had just arrived outside the gate, equally upset.

When they met a few hours later, Simon suggested they take a tent and some sleeping bags and camp out in Dollu, a forested valley near Pharping, one of their favourite hiking destinations.

That night the friends slept on a patch of land behind a small restaurant, under the watchful eyes of Padmeshambahava, the Guru Rinpoche, whose new, 40m statue dominates the settlement. While aftershocks brought further terror to the village, the friends felt strangely at ease.

“It was as if the place wanted us,” says Chitravu, a website developer. He and his wife Swikriti, an architect, had for some time been talking about buying land in a village to escape the city. A few days later a Nepali farmhouse was offered to them. They bought it, and moved in.

Says Chitravu: “The earthquake landed us here. I now believe if there is a dream inside you it will manifest.”

Simon’s connection with Nepal dates from 1978, when he arrived in Freak Street after travelling overland from India, and checked into the Lagan Lodge. He returned to Nepal in 2008, as the manager of the UN Volunteer program. When his contract ended in 2013 he stayed on to support a Danish IT company. The 2015 earthquake made him reconsider his life once again.

“Ever since I travelled as a backpacker to Nepal and India in the late ’70s I dreamed of running my own place,” says Simon. It took the anthropologist 25 years to realise his dream: establishing the Solid Rock Restaurant and Lodge (pic, extreme right) in Dollu. It has six cottages and a restaurant that uses bamboo as an earthquake-resistant feature.

Dollu is now known as “Little Tibet” because of its eight grand Tibetan gyarkhuns, home to 5,000 monks. The resort is located at the valley’s edge, and looks out across green hills, farmers’ fields and traditional village homes.

“It’s that end of the valley feeling that attracted me to this place,” says Simon. “There is nothing behind us, just rocks and
BETWEEN THE CRACKS: Krishna Bahadur Gurung and his family sit outside their temporary shelter in the village of Sarathok which, because it is located in Chitwan district, has not received as much attention as neighbouring Garkha (left)

The devastation in Sarathok three days after the April 2015 earthquake (left, top) and today. Although the debris has been cleared, many houses are still in ruins (left, below).

We are just across the mountain from Barpak but people don’t think of us as victims of the earthquake because we’re in Chitwan,” says Krishna Bahadur Gurung, who heads a local relief committee.

Gurung is a retired soldier who left the city to move back to his village 16 years ago to look after his aging parents and tend his orange orchard. The earthquake shook everything up, and Gurung has spent the last two years shuttling between Sarathok and the highway, organising relief.

When the earthquake struck, Sarathok was in Darchewak VDC, but with local restructuring for the 15 May elections it falls within Ichyakamana Rural Municipality. However, since they have had little help, these administrative changes mean little to villagers here.

One of the earliest challenges that Gurung encountered post-quake was collecting the Rs 10,000 from each household to clear rockfall that had blocked the road to the village, for relief that never came.

For most of Sarathok’s residents, building a house is synonymous with rebuilding a community and resuming their cultural activities. Despite delays and government neglect, they are hopeful to soon get back on their feet.

Says Gurung, “Last year we thought we would finally get the rebuilding grant, but another year has gone by. We hope the government will keep its word.”

mountains, which creates a solid impression.”

Another attraction is the village’s spiritual significance.

In the eight century, Padmasambhava, the founder of the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, used the local caves to meditate with his Nepali consort Shakya Devi. After reaching enlightenment he is said to have conquered the menacing goddess Dadchokkali and built her a temple, before moving to Tibet.

A famous pilgrimage destination for Tibetan Buddhists, for whom the place is as sacred as Bodhgaya, the area is now on the tourist map with the Padmasambhava status. Hikes across the hills connect Dolla to Pharping and Champa Devi. Rock climbing is being promoted and it is already known as a paradise for bird watchers.

Sims recently married Meena KC, a student and social worker who supervises the development of an organic vegetable garden at the resort. Although Chiraya and Swikriti regularly return to the city to spend time with their families, they feel rooted in Dolla.

Swikriti continues to work as an architect and says she experiences more clarity in her work: “Living in Dolla has taught me a stability I did not even know I was missing.”

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Tinkune International Airport cum National Park

Pashupati Nath is the patron deity of our secular republic, and it is perhaps the land of the Animals’ presently to Nepal’s only international aerodrome that has made the aviation hub a sanctuary for wildlife.

While the debate rages on in academic circles about whether the leopard that made a runway incursion this week was a Common Leopard, Unchamet Leopard, Snowy or Dusty Leopard, one thing is certain: Tribhuvan International Airport should be renamed Tinkune National Park. And it is about time the Civil Aviation Authority came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Animal husbandry where it rightfully belongs.

This will make it a fitting showcase for tourists arriving or departing Kathmandu by air, to observe our great leap (portum pars) in Big Cat conservation. The airport management should also institute some laws, and arrange regular sightings of wildlife on the runway so that Nepal goes viral on the Internets and continues to make international headlines.

As we old-timers know, there is nothing new about animals straying into Kathmandu airport – they are just returning to a habitat that was rightfully theirs in the first place. After all, Gausha used to provide lush grazing for water buffaloes before it started providing lush growing for grey-haired customs officials. Today, the newly renamed Tinkune International Airport cum National Park offers a good conservation and avian can go hand in hand in the buffer zone. Planes and animals can co-exist.

The challenge for the future is how to introduce more wildlife species into the runway, airport and hangar areas so that the airport can double as a safari and the international terminal building can be turned into a Museum of Natural History for wild bear, feral dogs, primates, and last but not least, the Tibetan Wild Ass (Equus kong). But that should not be a difficult proposition for the Kangre Mau Mau Coalition, which has shown that it is a government with a can-do attitude that has successfully eradicated load shedding and small pass, provided free brain transplants to politicians, and has now taken the step of going boldly forth where no previous Nepalese government has ever dared go before to ban hooching.

As a regular driver in Kathmandu on what are euphemistically referred to as roads, the Ass would be the first to admit that he is one hoary dude. I thank all the time. And most drivers like me are simply obeying instructions embossed across the backside of trucks to Blow horn. Not to taunt my own horn, but the donkey is a law abiding citizen.

This is why I am in a quandary whether here I am on the Gausha immersion I should obey the law of the land or the command on the truck ahead of me. We used to hooch for everything in Nepal to get good fellow-travelers to cursed other drivers, to warn pedestrians to get out of the way on tractors, and to keep ourselves from falling asleep at the wheel. Now it looks like drivers at Kathmandu will have to hooch to warn leopards to get off the runway.